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Towards multidimensional indicators of child growth and development - 2015

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Second Progress Report of the Task Force:

**“Toward Multidimensional Indicators of Child Growth
and Development”**

October 2015



The IUNS task force “Toward Multidimensional Indicators of Child Growth and Development” was established in 2013 with several aims: a) To serve as a platform where multidimensional child growth can be discussed between scientists and between professionals from international organizations, b) To serve as a platform where scientists and health professionals can discuss the need and development of such a set of indicators, c) To conduct research on the multiple dimensions of child growth, d) To develop a set of indicators for assessing child growth in a multi-dimensional context, and e) To arrange a call for papers for scholars from the relevant team to contribute to the idea of multidimensional child growth. In its first annual report¹ the task force had envisioned to carry out some key activities. This report provides an overview of the task force performed activities between June 2014 and September 2015, using the first report and its planned activities as the base.

1. Developing a research proposal (quantitative) on multidimensional child growth, identifying and obtaining the relevant data, initiating the analysis -- A proposal has been developed to apply a multidimensional approach to child growth. Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach (CA) is recruited as an evaluative framework in the proposal. Applying the CA helps focusing on what children are actually able to achieve in their growth by analyzing the required resources (endowments) as well as mechanisms that could enhance or restrict access to those resources (conversion factors). In addition, children’s growth could be assessed next to caregiver’s capabilities that children need to rely on to achieve their fullest potentials (concerning growth). Three key steps are defined in the proposal for the evaluation of multidimensional child growth. At the first step children with growth faltering will be identified. Next, caregiver’s capability set, as well as resources and social factors could be analyzed. Finally, healthy children who live in poor conditions could also be identified. The latter stage helps exploring factors that influence household’s resilience in protecting their children from malnutrition, and eventually come up with suggestions for growth monitoring practices. The proposal will then be operationalized for empirical analysis.

2. Developing a research proposal (qualitative) on ethnography of child growth, initiating the field research -- The proposal aims to perform an ethnography research on child growth in order to explore socio-cultural and biological contexts of child growth in Tanzania. Specifically, the study will seek to explore people’s conceptualization of optimal child growth and growth faltering, perceived indicators used in assessing growth of young children; as well as examining contextual factors that mediate caregivers’ capabilities relevant to growth of young children in Kagera, Tanzania. The proposal was designed and finalized as a PhD research and is currently at the stage of data. The information from this PhD study will provide important insights about contextual-based understanding of child growth in Tanzania thus enable programmers and policy makers to (1) successfully design comprehensive approaches to promote healthy growth and development among under-five children and (2) develop a multi-dimensional tool for monitoring children’s growth. This is owing to the fact that effective monitoring of children’s growth does not only imply having the proper instruments and specialized personnel to take weight and height, but also using conceptualizations derived from caregivers’ knowledge of child growth to convey the proper messages that may be sensitive to their socio-cultural contexts.

3. A preliminary analysis of the Electronic Human Relations Area Files, Yale University as a cross cultural ethnographic database to understand perceptions about child growth -- The preliminary

¹ See: http://www.iuns.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2012/03/annual-report_chair_Dr-Haisma.pdf

assessment of the data is finished and a draft paper is available. The paper examines the perception of child growth from a cross cultural ethnographic database. The specific objective of this study is to understand the perceived dimensions of child growth and the indicators used to assess/monitor growth of children in communities from different socio-cultural context. The analysis of perception of child growth in different pre-modern societies would give important insights into conceptualizing child growth in context and for building multi-dimensional tool for monitoring child growth. Two task force members will be working on the initial analysis in order to submit it to a journal.

4. Conducting a research to assess and compare the current growth monitoring practices in countries with different stages of nutrition transition -- Last year, different possibilities were explored in order to recruit datasets (cohort) in the Netherlands for multidimensional analysis of child growth, using the Capability Approach. For the most part, the existing datasets include good amount of information about children's anthropometric indicators and their household's social (and to some extent economic) situation. Nevertheless, they fell short in terms of information about social factors, resources and capabilities. We found out that DHS India has some detailed information that could be used as dimensions (under conversion factors and capabilities) or proxy to some dimensions. Currently, DHS India is under analysis. We apply the Capability Approach in order to analyze children's growth (anthropometric measures) vis-à-vis their caregiver's capability sets. The analysis aims to shed some lights on the dynamics between caregiver's capability sets, as well as the social factors and resources that interact with children's growth.

5. Working on some papers suggested at the working group meeting -- At this stage the task force members have an initial draft of several papers and aim to finalize them and turn them to publications:

- Towards a multi-dimensional measure of child growth that is context-specific
- 'How should children grow?': Analysis of a cross cultural ethnographic database to understand perceptions about child growth
- Applying a Capability Approach to child growth

6. Next to the above mentioned activities the taskforce had a research workshop on child malnutrition as a preparatory event to EXPO Milano 2015. In a two-days workshop in February 2015, task force members discussed the progress of the VIDI project. The meeting was also an opportunity to elaborate in more depth how the Capability Approach could be operationalized to measure multidimensional child growth.

7. The most recent activity is designing a second proposal (as a PhD research) that focuses on normative determinants of child nutrition and wellbeing in the context of Bangladesh.